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FIELD EXPERIENCES ON WEANING WITHOUT HIGH DOSES OF ZINC OXIDE AND ANTIBIOTICS

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Background and Objectives

In the Danish pig industry, a high level of zinc oxide in weaner diets (2500 ppm) is commonly used to control post weaning diarrhea (PWD) and thereby reducing the antimicrobial use for treating PWD. The European Commission has banned the use of a high level of in-feed zinc oxide by June 2022. The objective of this study was to describe management approaches and feeding regimes in Danish pig farms that have already phased out the use of high level of zinc oxide in weaner diets.

Material & Methods

A project group was established, including seven pig veterinary practitioners and project leaders from SEGES. This group identified 10 pig farms with weaned pigs without using a high level of in-feed zinc oxide for a minimal period of six months. Farmers were interviewed on feeding regimes, hygiene measures, productivity, and antimicrobial use.

Results

The feeding strategies in the 10 study farms were characterized by a low level of standardized ileal digestible (SID) protein (avg. 164 grams /kg feed) and a high level of SID lysine (avg. 12,9 grams /kg feed) in the starter diet for weaners. Increasing feed uptake after weaning was prioritized in nine out of 10 farms. Management strategies focused on a stabile production with an optimized pig flow and experienced farm personnel. Productivity was comparable with national average apart from mortality in weaners which was low in the 10 study farms (mean: 1,8%). Antimicrobial use for weaners was below national average.

Conclusion

This study showed that it is possible to wean pigs without using zinc oxide, maintaining a comparable productivity, welfare, and antimicrobial use. The field experiences acquired in this study will be used in the future to ensure a cost-efficient pig production without using zinc oxide and with a minimal use of antimicrobials.